

The Independent

Reformer for the People

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Campaign Dollar\$: The Real Giver\$ and Taker\$

Every five years in Belize, there is a momentous power transaction that takes place between the people of Belize and aspiring political leaders – incumbent and opposition.

On this one occasion, the people use their vote to voice their deepest feelings about the way the country's affairs are being run. The vote communicates everything imaginable – frustration, a sense of being let down, anger, disgruntlement, change, hope, and trust. For this single day, the power truly belongs to the people.

But if recent history teaches us anything about our political leaders it is this: once this power is fused and given to the elected politicians on Election Day, once this power is adopted as “*mandate*,” the “*power*” shifts from the people to the politicians and consistently, the politicians “*lord*” their power over the people for the next five years.

How else can one explain how in the last general election, the political parties spent in excess of \$40 million

dollars to negotiate control of that “*mandate*?” Considering that Belize has a small population of only 300,000, this translates to \$133.00 per person; this is enough to pay for a round trip ticket to San Pedro for each Belizean on Election Day.

The questions needing answers are – where does all this money come from? Who are the real givers? Who are the real takers? What does this money supply chain look like?

In looking for answers, one cannot help but think about the story of Braa Anansi and his money scheme. Braa Anansi needed money to pay for his personal plans so he went to his friends, Braas fowl, rooster, fox, dog, and tiger respectively, asking them to chip in on a loan with the promise to pay back the next day.

Sure enough, when payback time came, Braa Anansi arranged for each of his creditors to come collect at one hour intervals from each other. Fowl came first and during the hour that she waited, braa fox came and ate up

fowl. But before fox could wipe his mouth clean, dog showed up and munched fox; within the hour, braa tiger showed up and munched dog. Yet still, and even as tiger was savoring dog, braa hunter showed up and shot tiger.


When all was said and done, there were only two left standing -braa Anansi and hunter! Braa hunter was very satisfied with his kill, for there was much return on his investment – meat, money, and trophy. For Braa Anansi, he did not have to pay a cent; all his friends did. So they both sat down and had a party.

What is the moral of this story? It is this: in the campaign money supply chain, those who appear to be the biggest givers are in fact the biggest takers. When the campaign financier gives the politician money, he is sure

to get back much more; the financier makes sure of this.

And when the politician “*borrow*s” money to give to the Belizean voter, there is only one way he can make sure he has the ability to pay back – he drops the Braa Anansi “*whap*” on the Belizean voter and taxpayer. If you need proof of this, take a look at our national budget; 80% of expenditures are financed by the people's taxes. And even as I write, the peoples' land is being used to liquidate debts to the financiers.

So when the Belizean voter believes he or she is “*getting*” from the politician, he or she is actually the one doing the “*giving*.”

At a recent SPEAR “*yaad talk*” forum, a highly respected professor at a local university put it this way: (Please Turn To Page 3) 

RBTT mulls ‘combination/ partnership’ venture

Roxanne Stapleton Friday, April 20, 2007

THE RBTT Financial Group last week confirmed that it received a proposal from a third party with “respect to a possible combination/partnership”.

The statement which was issued first to its staff said: “This proposal is under consideration and RBTT can confirm that its board of directors has made no decision to recommend it to shareholders.

“Furthermore, there can be no assurance that a transaction will result from this or any proposal. RBTT continually investigates any and all opportunities that could enhance shareholder value,” adding that it takes into account the best interests of its principal stakeholders, including its shareholders, employees and customers.


Prior to last week's statement,

RBTT's chairman, Peter July, maintained that his group has not agreed to the sale of the bank or to a merger with any third party, noting, however, that RBTT continues to have discussions of a strategic nature regarding its portfolio.

“Discussions of this nature have been ongoing for at least the past two years and continue,” he stated.

But with Friday's confirmation of a proposal, staffers told the Trinidadian press that they remain uneasy.

Canadian and local media reports about talks of a merger or acquisition between local financial giant, RBTT and FirstCaribbean International Bank (FCIB, a subsidiary of Canadian bank, CIBC), have left them both frantic and angry that they've never been “freely allowed to have union representation”.

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Dancing the Night Away



Selim Hoy and Inga Woods dancing in the Pallotti fund raising dance competition (See Story on pg 14)

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The Good Gardener

Dear Editor,

I would like to address this to your readers, if I may:

My fellow Belizeans, I wish to speak with you about something that many of you are acquainted with as a child. Do you remember the days of tending a garden as a child? Do you remember the work that a garden was as a child and reflect on what a joy it is as an adult? It's funny how things change.

I remember as a child, having to plant and loathing even more the task of weeding. No matter how hard I worked to keep the weeds down, they always popped up quicker than the harvest and I would have to do four times the work to keep the weeds under control just to get a simple harvest. It was overwhelming at times and I wondered why my parents insisted on this practice. Now I know. They were teaching me a greater objective, because, my brothers and sisters, I have come to realize that our government is our garden as well.

We must tend to it; we must nurture it; and above all, we must weed it. It's so easy in this day and age to feel somehow the government garden isn't ours anymore...somehow we are sharecroppers in the process. This is not the truth: we are the farmers and we need to take responsibility.

The problem is that we have ignored our garden and now the weeds are intertwined with our precious plants. These are the plants that can sustain us should we pay them some mind.

I took time out and weeded my

own personal garden yesterday. My next step is to weed my government garden in which I now I share responsibility with everyone else in Belize. I will no longer accept foreign weeds into my country. They will no longer overtake my precious fruits. I will welcome ladybugs and the like and I will know that they are ladybugs by the actions that they bestow on my garden. When someone introduces artificial fertilizers, I will send them packing. When someone in my government tries to starve my crop I will send them packing as well.

Belize is a garden and the only thing holding her back is participation of her farmers that love Her. Please everyone, wake up and let's all tend to our precious garden of Belize.

-Contributed

KREM at war with PUP/Ashcroft.!

Amandala's editorial last week ended:

"We are trying to figure out why KREM Radio's road has been so rocky.

Why did Ashcroft initiate a process in 1994 to put himself in position to sabotage KREM? Why is the Barrow law firm leading the charge against KREM in a general election year? Why did a PUP Cabinet Minister travel with Lord Ashcroft to the Democratic Republic of the Congo just days ago? Is the plot against KREM Radio in 2007 as bipartisan as the Aikman bankruptcy conspiracy was in 1992? In the words of the late Harry Caray, there is danger here, cherie."

We sympathize with KREM considering that we too seem to be in the PUP's firing line. Ever since the launch of The INdependent the PUP has tried to wipe us out by all means possible.

It is a compliment to KREM that the 'powers that be' and their backers are so frightened of them - and of the freedom of the press. We take it as a complimenttoo!

Meb Cutlack.

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Borderline



By: Karla Heusner Vernon

"Oh no, we left the door open!" We ran towards the vehicle in the parking lot. It had been such a perfect day, a great outing and now I was sure the entire thing was ruined. All our purchases would be gone from the trunk, on the seats, our bags with cameras and papers, everything would have disappeared. All we would be left with were our documents, purses and wallets.

But to our amazement, nothing had been touched. Shoppers had walked right by our vehicle, with its door flung wide, and either not noticed it was unattended or not dared to approach it.

"This could never happen in Belize!" said one of our party. And we knew he was right. In Belize you lock everything and take everything you can carry with

you.

But in Chetumal apparently there is still some respect for property and fear of the law. Drug addicts do not roam the streets to pillage at will and gang boys do not help themselves to your possessions just for the fun of it.

We considered ourselves very, very lucky. And then we grew sad as we real-

You have to wonder how Belize got to where it is now, and Chetumal to where it is.

ized the contrast between this place and the place where we live. A place where there are no shopping malls with parking lots such as these, no roaming security vehicles or perhaps even cameras keeping an eye on the cars. No honor system among fellow drivers.

We noticed the dozens of scooter and motorcycle riders got off their bikes and put their helmets on the handlebars. Without the least concern that someone would walk off with them.

In Belize you often come back to find no wheel, no seat, no bike.

I am not naïve enough to believe there is no crime in Chetumal. That people are never robbed or hurt by thugs and thieves.

That tourists are not jacked or money never extorted by police or traffic cops. That taxi drivers and gas stations do not cheat those unfamiliar with their money and rates.

I know these things happen. But apparently there is still some respect for the law, some need for order in this place where you can drive on roads where traffic

signs and rules are actually obeyed by the majority of people. Where parks at the seaside have signs urging visitors to respect the image of the community by not drinking or loitering or playing loud music.

A place where you can take your family out to dinner or a show, or fill your gas tank to "F" without spending what feels like a week's salary. Where basic food items are within reach of the population that needs to eat them. Where education is compulsory and materials provided.

As we sped along the highway and onto the brand new overpass, I could understand why Cornelius Dueck, leader of the National Reform Party, said recently that

he almost cried when he went to Chetumal. For everywhere you look you see progress, new roads, new shops, new homes.

But even more importantly, you see a community where people are not only productive, they have recreational and cultural facilities at every street corner. We passed no fewer than three junior soccer matches and children's basketball games, well equipped and well kept schools, neatly appointed homes and clean little taxis speeding along.

All the cars in Chetumal look clean and shiny and brand new, no matter their age. I suppose because the roads are good and there are car wash stands all over.

Joggers and walkers were up and down the strip of pavement by the sea, working out after a hard day at work, before a Friday night spent socializing in decent clubs or attractive restaurants. I doubt any of them ever returned to find their car window smashed or their home burglarized in their absence. I doubt such a thing even occurs to them.

In short, the place is a functioning city, not a dysfunctional one. Police appear frequently, keeping the peace more than anything else and citizens do not glare at each other beligerently or defiantly. Young men are fash-

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Campaign Dollar\$: The Real Giver\$ and Taker\$

■ (Continued From Page 1)
“the poor continue to elect the rich to keep them richer, and the rich continue to give to the poor to keep them poorer.”

In an OAS forum on “Paying for Political Parties and Campaigns in the Caribbean,” Heads of State and Governments expressed concern over the high cost of elections, the sources of campaign funding and the influence the financiers have over governments. During this forum, there was a call for reform – disclosure of campaign finance sources, disclosure of contributions and gifts received, and caps on amounts to be spent on election campaigns. But it is questionable how much of these regional leaders actually had the political will to implement the necessary reforms.

In its 1998 Manifesto “Set Belize Free,” the PUP, promising political reform and power to the people, stated: “Campaign financing legislation will be enacted to ensure disclosure of financial contribu-

tions to political parties and candidates to limit campaign expenditure.” It is not surprising that to date, this promise is yet to be fulfilled.

As the next general elections draws near, it is important for the people of Belize—the voters—to bear in mind the moral of the story recounted above. What then, is the conclusion of all this? This is it: Campaign Finance Reform must begin with the people! This is the reality.



By: Gus A. Perera

Borderline

■ (Continued From Page 3)
ionably dressed and greet one another with respect and cordiality; their pants do not sag, their hair is not raging at the world trying to give them the wildest possible image. They putt around on scooters or small economical cars. I did not hear a single vehicle banging out music, nor see any circling suspiciously.

The young women dress attractively, even sexily, but do not appear to be advertising their wares to the highest bidder with the fanciest ride, regardless of the age differential.

In short, the young people appear to have respect for each other, and themselves. Someone has given it to them. Their parents, grandparents, schools, the laws and rules which govern their town and the consequences that result for infractions.

Do they count the seconds they talk or their text messages to make sure they do not run out of credit? I doubt it. Do they look over their shoulders constantly to see if someone will shoot them? I doubt it. Do they yearn to move to the States or somewhere else because they feel they have no future, no prospect of education or decent jobs? I doubt it. From the number of escuela this and escuela that and institute of this and institute of that, I doubt it very much.

I do not for a moment believe they live in paradise, but at least they are not in the hell so many of our people are in. People who call the radio station following neighborhood

shooting sprees to say they must now sleep with their windows closed or on the floor in fear of bullets. Where couples out necking can wind up dead by a bridge up the road, where elderly people sitting at home in the evening can wind up beaten and left for dead. What a relief not to spend your days looking over your shoulder to see who has come begging or tieing.

You have to wonder how Belize got to where it is now, and Chetumal is where it is.

You have to wonder why we have let the bad element, the drug lords and the drug addicts take over our community while the people of Chetumal have not. Of course they have their share of narco-violence, of domestic murders and violence.

But they probably have a rapid and strong response to these things. And people probably go to jail.

Will we ever find ourselves as fortunate as our neighbors across the border? Or will we continue to plunge even further down in our development and lose what little remains of our dignity and hope? How many Belizeans will enter Chet and wish that they too lived there instead of here. Or that here was more like there. Wondering why and how there is such a huge difference in the standard of living, and quality of life in two places separated only by a tiny river.



Amazing isn't it!? How big the bite of an orca killer whale is, eh Minister?
But not as big as the bite you are putting on Belize, mi Lawd!

Praise the Lord



By: Trevor Vernon

This here is feast and famine season in Belize. Feasts for the very few, but only if you are true red and blue and willing to praise the Lord. A new day has dawned in Belize where only political insiders (of both colors) are getting all the sweetened deals. Deals which have been and will continue to cost the taxpayers of Belize everything they have and own. Belize has been sold out to the world's best predator and the general populace will have hell to pay, elections or no elections. No matter who is voted in, or voted out.

The sellers of our national patrimony with their law degrees and unscrupulous legal advisors have taken our system of governance, and by extension the citizenry, for fools. But even though they play sheep, the citizenry is not totally asleep. The people of Belize understand the incestuous co-mingling of powers at every level and finally recognize the red and blue are in bed at the pinnacle. Even Musa's handpicked elite appointed to the good governance commission resigned en masse last year when they got the sense that they were just assembled to add credibility to the wanton fire sale of the assets of Belize. These are big people with big titles, high morals and even grander egos who aren't as easily bought as the man thought they were. It gives us hope to see them walk.

We need hope, for we get no relief

from public hearings and inquiries. Belizeans already know how much money has been stolen from us and our once sacred public institutions. We know that the suitcases filled with money carried by morally bankrupt mules offer only a glimpse of what actually leaves this country every month. Fifty trips at one million US each? Just the tip of the iceberg. Whisked away while international financial intelligence units and DEA were looking the other way. Asleep in their security booths, or just voyeurs?

Liberty has no foundation with him and he uses us all as a cover story, down to the orphaned children.

Hard to believe they could be that lax.

But where did all the millions creamed off the top really go?

1) to big tax write offs for the companies of the British Lord who says publicly that he was a socially dejected illegitimate child

2) to big tax write offs for the nouveaux riche (lower ranking blue financiers, including Lukas who the street says is using the Lord's investment capital)

3) big loan write-offs at DFC, also for the lower ranking financiers including Lukas

4) duty free containers to select merchants of a certain extraction

5) sovereign guarantees gone bad; guarantees given only to the ultra select few (absolutely no reds here)

6) fire-sale of government & quasi government bodies' assets, often times with nothing more than a promissory note

7) give-away of seaport, airport, customs & registry that were a major

source of income

8) major give-away of national lands (not necessarily blaming the National Resource Ministry on this)

9) major give-away of our oil resources to themselves and the front company

So which were the companies that actually benefited to the detriment of our country's resources? We have to say companies because their lawyers have structured the raping through Private Limited Companies, "Public Compa-

nies" and Offshore Companies. The latter is the domain of a myriad of legal instruments orchestrated by none other than the Lord, or should we say King, of Belize. Everywhere you look you see this legalistic footprints, fingerprints, and other indentations made in the sand with the explicit backing, not only of our own government, but those in the great white north.

While Belize has been known to bring bigger dances to an end, this is not the case with this man's song and dance. Sophisticated companies, with ownership of the offshore registry even, have apparently locked up and locked down the entire political system of Belize. The leaders of both major parties make excuses for him because "he pays me handsomely" or "we have to follow the money." Only Mark, the Morality Minister, bridled at the master-puppet relationship.

The Lord controls, or tries to control, most of the media in Belize with the help of both red & blue leadership

and his corporate entities. One of these companies is now so power-hungry it has given the Judiciary the finger--repeatedly. Remarkably no law enforcement body has forced them to comply with any injunctions or rulings to reinstate employees.

Which begs the question: how can the big empire-building, democracy supporting governments in the north uphold an anti-democratic institution such as the one which manipulates every aspect of business in Belize?

How can London and Foggy Bottom allow a modern day slave master to keep supposedly free people poor and indigent? What logic can the analysts use to justify carrying this man around and showing him off as Lord of our Manor? He certainly is not Belizean. He could never be. Legally he may have a passport but a Belizean he sure ain't.

While common law tradition countries talk poverty alleviation they insert their own born and bred parasite to suck the life blood out of our economy and plunge MORE people into a life of poverty. Liberty has no foundation with him and he uses us all as a cover story, down to the orphaned children.

Those of us who have the ability to speak for the poor and indigent of Belize, even the suffering middle class, must say to both superpowers: help us rid ourselves not only of this corrupt government, but also this despot. Please withdraw your unconditional support for the usurper; at the very least place some conditions on his freewheeling buccaneering ways. His presence, at your behest, is not only an affront to democracy in the region, it is plunging us back into colonial darkness. There must be other, less barbaric ways of accomplishing your foreign policy objectives.

First-Ever Residential/Golf Resort Planned for Belize

Media Release--Wednesday April 18, Belize City Smugglers Run Plantation, a 1,000-acre master-planned community, is being introduced here this week as the English-speaking country's first-ever destination resort with a championship golf course.

"Belize has long been known for its exquisite beauty, world-class diving and fishing," said J. Trevor Miles, president and CEO. "With our new resort, it also will soon be known for affordable luxury living and championship golf, all with a strong Belizean flavor."

Smugglers Run Plantation will include 600 town homes and duplex villas, 339 private estate lots, 26 equestrian estate

lots, 22 executive estate lots, 540 deluxe condominiums, 200 themed condominiums, a 200-room all suite hotel, a 77-room themed all-suites hotel, spa and a town center with retail shopping and cinema. A separate five-acre parcel also will include 100 luxury sea-view condominiums, waterfront access featuring a marina with 240 slips (60 wet/180 dry) and a beach club component.

Current real estate opportunities range in price from \$59,000 to more than \$1 million. Owners will have the option to buy a golf membership for approximately \$20,000.

Construction on the 18-hole golf course—designed by Arthur Hills of Toledo,

Ohio-based Arthur Hills/Steve Forrest and Associates—is set to begin in January 2008. Due to open in early 2009, the 7,223-yard, par 72 layout will be the first golf course to be designed by an internationally renowned architect in the country's history, and will be complemented by a 34,000-square-foot clubhouse.

Formerly known by British Honduras, Belize is located on the Caribbean Sea, bordered by Mexico and Guatemala, and is growing in popularity as a retirement destination for those seeking a lower cost of living, particularly for residents of the U.S. and Canada. The country's Retired Person's Incentive Program allows qualifying individuals to live free of Belize taxes.

Another major plus is Belize's subtropical climate with an annual mean temperature of 79 degrees. The humidity is seldom oppressive and nicely tempered by cooling sea breezes.

The resort is an easy 20-minute drive to the Belize International Airport (BZE), close to city businesses, hotels, and restaurants, and to the Belize Tourism Village where the cruise ships arrive daily. It is approximately two hours from five major U.S. gateways: Dallas, Miami, Houston, Atlanta and Charlotte, N.C.

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Doha talks went well



Dr. Richard Bernal

by Julian Richardson Friday, April 20, 2007 Jamaican Gleaner

Dr. Richard Bernal - Head of the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (CRNM), has described last week's meeting with World Trade Organisation (WTO) director general, Pascal Lamy, as useful and timely.

Lamy was in Jamaica to meet with Caribbean trade ministers in order to update them on the Doha Development Round of WTO talks. The director general also took the opportunity to listen to the Doha interests of the Caribbean, which he said has traditionally been a solid integrated unit in trade talks.

"It is my job to listen to specific positions of various members and it is also part of my job to brief them on exactly where we are in the negotiations as I see," Lamy told journalists last Friday during his one-day visit to the island.

"The Caribbean focus is traditionally, in WTO, very solidly organised, united and speaking with one voice and it's good that given this sort of huge investment that this region has made in trade negotiations, I spend a bit of time with them in direct physical contact."

The Doha Round of negotiations, which began with a ministerial-level meeting in Doha, Qatar in 2001, is aimed at lowering trade barriers around the world, allowing free trade between countries. The talks have missed numerous deadlines and were recently stalled over a divide between developed nations such as the European Union (EU), the United States (US) and Japan, and major developing nations such as Brazil, India and China. The conflict was

based on the developing countries' demands for the developed countries' to cut farm subsidies and their refusal to grant the wealthier nations greater market access.

Last week, six key members of the WTO - the US, EU, Brazil, India, Japan and Australia - met in New Delhi, India and proposed a new year-end deadline to complete negotiations.

"We made this very firm determination that the Round be completed by the end of this year or beginning of next year, which, given what remains to be done, means that all these big headline issues like agricultural subsidies and tariffs, and industrial tariffs, these things need to be cracked before we celebrate," Lamy disclosed to the media.

Dr Bernal, in an interview with the Caribbean Business Report (CBR) yesterday, said that the Caribbean trade ministers used Lamy's visit last week, as a platform to present pressing concerns that the region has with the Doha talks. The director general of the CRNM said that the concerns were well received by Lamy.

"The meeting was useful and timely. We had a chance to discuss how we feel about (the Doha Round) going forward," said Dr Bernal. "On our side, we took the opportunities to reiterate

our priority issues and our concerns, which is good because (Lamy) is going to all the trade meetings and it is good to make sure he is fully aware of what we are interested in."

Dr Bernal added that it is important that the concerns of poorer countries in the developing world are not side-tracked by the determination of the larger players to meet a specific deadline. The CRNM head disclosed to the CBR, five key issues that CARICOM ministers presented to Lamy:

(1) So far, the CARICOM trade ministers do not think that adequate attention has been given to developing countries

(2) The CRNM feels that the onus is on breaking the deadlock, wrestling the developed countries and changing their position on agricultural subsidies and domestic support

(3) CARICOM is participating fully in the Doha process and are committed to it

(4) The CRNM believes that all vulnerable developing countries are to be given special consideration and special treatment

(5) It is more important to get a good agreement than to finish on any particular schedule or deadlock.

All Belizeans must benefit from Belize's natural resources

VIP maintains the policy that **"All Belizeans must benefit equitably from the use of Belize's natural resources"**. This policy and Belize's national interest was assaulted in the most degrading manner when government announced last week that it intends to sell the People's 10% shares in BNE, the only viable oil business we have. Belize's national interest was further violated when the Opposition yesterday announced that it actually agrees with government's idea of selling the people's shares.

Our justification for opposing this sale is that:

1. The people of Belize already own the shares. As it is, all Belizean will benefit from the profits of these shares.

2. Selling those shares will take away from the poor, without any compensation, what is already and naturally theirs.

3. Such a sale will allow an unfair advantage to those who can pay for those shares. This will result in a wider gap between the rich and the poor in Belize.

4. Selling those shares and saving the proceeds for later use will effectively cut off the future earning of those shares from people who cannot afford to pay for them today.

5. Selling those shares make them vulnerable to foreign take-over as share buyers may quickly sell to foreigners to gain profit.

6. By selling those shares government will have no direct input in the company's management to ensure that the interest of Belize is safeguarded.

The national interest of Belize demands that a long term strategic plan for our petroleum industry be established. Such a plan must address the training needs of Belizeans and must contemplate our country's ability to con-

duct petroleum exploration and production.

The VIP warns Belizeans that our generations will suffer for this reckless and callous sale should it materialize. Here is a repeat of our past mistakes with BEL, BWSL, BTL, PORTS OF BELIZE, and others. Here is a repeat of the mistakes of African and South American oil industries where poor

people have not benefitted from this natural wealth. Belize's misfortune in this matter will fall squarely on the People's United Party led Administration and its supporter, the United Democratic Party, and any other who supports this sale.

Belizean brothers and sisters, let us stand firm and oppose this sale in any way shape or form.



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One more try



By: William Schmidt
PG correspondent for
INdependent Weekly

A letter to the Director of the Institute of Archaeology Dr. Jamie Awe

Dear Mr. Awe

As you know the rural people of Toledo, over 70 percent of Maya heritage, are considered the poorest in Toledo. However in my opinion (I have lived and worked in Toledo for over 35 years) the poorest people in Toledo are living in a place behind Punta Gorda Town called Indian Vil.

I have an article in the INdependent Reformer I'll send along telling a little of their plight. Several years ago some of the citizens asked me if I could help them to find some work. I had previously helped some of the rural villages to form the Toledo Ecotourism Association and their Village Guesthouse Eco Trail Program, it helped some to be able to stay in their villages and make some extra money. It also helped some of them to revive some of their arts and crafts, music, dance, stories, medicinal, and other knowledge. You may have heard that in 1997 the Republic of Germany presented the TEA with the "To Do" prize for the world's most socially responsible community based eco-tourism program. It was presented by the secretary general of the World Tourism Association of the United Nations.

After several meetings the people from Indian Vil, 36 women and six men came up with the idea of creating an authentic recreation of a pre Hispanic Maya coastal trading village. We contacted my old friend, I could say our old friend Dr. Heather Mckillop and asked her if she would be willing to meet with the group to tell them what she had learned about the ancient Maya of the coast of Southern Belize, she said she would see if some of her graduate students would be interested. We formed the group under the Punta Gorda Conservation Committee which was registered in 2000. The local lands officer said the area we wanted was mostly swamp with only allow a little high land but no one had requested it, he provided us with a letter so stating. We went to our area representative Honorable Michael Espat who said he would be happy to help the group but the area had to be

surveyed and the Government of Belize could not help.

It took the group some time to collect the money but with contributions of labor and money from the community at large and the ESTAP program we were able to get a proper survey done. After several letters to the Minister of Lands and Natural Resources Honorable Jonny Bricinco, he asked local Lands Officer to help the group to get use of the land. The group explained that they did not have the money to lease the land and wanted the Government of Belize to have it designated a protected area as it was 90 percent wetlands. They would take responsibility for protecting and managing it. Eventually an appointment was made with the Conservation Department, again money was contributed by the community to send the officers of the group and myself (I paid my own way) to Belmopan. When we got there we were told the conservation officer had important business in Cayo. We said we waited over a month for this appointment. Did he arrange for anyone else to meet with us? "No!" We returned to Punta Gorda. The secretary told us she would get back to us with another appointment, but she never did. We called and got the same promise but never got an appointment.

Those Belizeans who live in the "forgotten district," especially poor Maya women and men, know all about this: no matter how many times the Government of Belize says it, it isn't so. I presume with the knowledge you have of the Maya you know what I'm writing about. Anyway, the situation has continued to get worse for the people here in Toledo. Poverty is increasing, racism against the Maya is increasing, more men have to leave to work in the citrus or banana plantations or the shrimp farms or tourist resorts up north. More alcohol, more drugs and more crime for the younger boys and girls they leave behind.

Over these last couple years I have gone to the Area Representative many times. He has repeatedly--and heatedly--told me "if the Minister of Lands and Natural Resources doesn't want to help this group, I can't make him."

I have even gone to the Right Honorable Prime Minister on two occasions. He asked for the survey papers and other important information about the project. He promised to see what he could do but no help was forthcoming. On my last visit he recommended I contact Yassar Musa of NICH. I waited two days in Belize City to see him, wrote three letters and made several calls on behalf of these people but he refused to even talk with me.

Miss Lela Vernon MBE, who is also head of the Punta Gorda Conservation

Committee, also met with Michael Espat, Yasser Musa and representatives of the Belize Tourism Board to get help for these people and their project to create employment for themselves while reviving their culture. I have sent three registered letters to Minister Godfrey Smith asking for his help. He has also refused to answer any of them..

The Maya Day Group hosted Mr. Angel Cal and his wife for dinner with Minister Espat. Mr. Cal who as you know, helped to get Maya history introduced to the primary school curriculum, told the group he was very impressed with the work they had done and if the Government of Belize would support the project he would recommend that the schools in Belize use it as an excellent field trip to see an authentic example of what the Maya had. Minister Espat again offered to help but again not help came. He said "he could not force the other ministers to help if they didn't want to."

Members of the group went to Mr. Paul Rodriguez, Belize Ombudsman on two occasions he said he had tried to help but he also could not force the government to help if they don't want to. The members of the group still want to try this program and still ask me what they can do. Most say they are only waiting to vote this government out to see if a new government will help them to help themselves.

Now we are writing you with the hope

that you will be ready, willing, able and wanting to help. We will send a copy of this letter to the Ministers and others we have mentioned with the hope that it will remind them of our previous attempts to get their help and that they will respond to your inquiries as to why they have steadfastly refused to help these humble citizens to get permission to use this land to create more employment for themselves. After being ignored so many times it may be a good idea to see if we can get this letter published in the newspaper. A good Eco Cultural tourism attraction and something that would revive and strengthen their culture and protect the presently endangered flora and fauna of the area is good for all concerned.

Why has the Ministry, NICH and others supported the good work at El Pilar with Dr. Anabel Ford, and refused to help Dr. Mckillop and others here in Toledo with a very similar project?

If you need any of the maps or other documents, copies of the many letters sent or any letter or any other information you might want, please let me know at your earliest convenience

Sincerely,

William Schmidt

Local Volunteer Consultant for the Toledo Ecotourism Association, Toledo Maya Cultural Council, Punta Gorda Conservation Committee



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Benque students learn about Tourism & Culture

By Pat Asling

The Benque House of Culture compound was the setting for a hot topic on Tuesday morning, April 17th. Over 200 students with their teachers, from Succotz and Benque, braved the cloudless sky and beaming sun to hear the special speaker, Mrs. Lucy Fleming, talk about tourism. She told them how Chaa Creek, the international award-winning Lodge, started with a small thatched hut, way back in 1981 and how, with plenty of hard work, it has become what it is today. She also interacted with the youth by asking them how they might want to get into tourism and by then giving them a number a facts about tourism in Belize and the opportunities they will have to impact on those figures in the coming years.

The children were also lucky as it was their final opportunity to see the wonderful photographs taken by Dirk Francisco of the nine protected areas managed by Belize Audubon Society, some of the very places that many tourists come to see. This display is now ended.



Benque school children attend presentation on tourism development.

Benque Viejo, as a centennial project in 2004, began construction of a 40' tower in the centre of Centennial Park. This project has progressed from the

tower, to the plaza surrounding it, to a number of donated benches scattered along the walkways, among the many blooming trees. The final phase is to install special lighting around the park. Funding is being sought from businesses and individuals towards this end.

We would like to thank those donors who have contributed thus far: Ford Foundation, Standard Oil, Government of Belize, First Caribbean and Belize Social Security Board. We would also like to thank CACHE members for helping clean the park and the Benque Fire Department for changing light bulbs, way up there. We appreciate these generous contributions but still much more is needed to complete the plan.

For information about coming events or other information call 823-2697.



Benque students get a heads up on opportunities in tourism from entrepreneur Lucy Fleming of Chaa Creek Resort.

Upcoming events at Benque HOC include another edition of “**Reflections**” at the end of the month, a new exhibit entitled “**Boats of Belize**” opening on Tuesday, May 8 and a **Band Concert** on Sunday, May 27. The exhibit is being compiled by the Archives personnel and will deal primarily with the Cayo boats and others plying the Old River between Belize City and San Ignacio. Guest speaker will be Mr. Norman Simplis, who was Officer-in-Charge of the Benque Police Force some 60 years ago, but before that traveled in many of these river boats.

The exhibit “**Faces of Christ**” will be on display until the end of April. It depicts those gentlemen who have portrayed Christ in the Passion Pageant over the past 15 years.

Some 12 children will also finish their classes in “English-as-a-second-language” in the coming week.

The Community of Artists for Cultural and Historical Endeavour,

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In Punta Gorda

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Main & Church Streets, walk down
hill 75 yards to Guesthouse.



Current Issues

What Gun Laws?

By: Meb Cutlack

Just what is going on with guns in our country? Belize City has truly become the wild west at its worse - and it seems every other day there is a shooting of some sort and, too often, a gruesome tally of young people, dead.

Where do the guns originate and how do they enter the country? Twenty-five years ago our customs people at the borders were very effective in stopping the entry of guns. They alerted travelers to the risk of bringing in unlicensed guns and informed visitors that there were draconian penalties if they were caught with any illegal firearm.

Today there seem to be no such controls - only surly customs officials trying to sniff out cornflakes, wine or salt crackers being brought in illegally.

There is no doubt that the drug wars on the streets of Belize City play a major role in our high crime and violence statistics.

The authorities appear to shrug at the possibility of doing anything real about the situation and yet almost every street kid on the Southside could give the police a run down on all the various gangs and their members.

The irony is that even the known 'shooters' of the gangs could be easily named because there is little or no fear along the street that anyone will tell - and many of the shooters are 'proud' and not ashamed of their role.

The sixty million dollar question in



Despite all the efforts by police and Crimestoppers to get guns off the streets, Belizean criminals seem to be always better armed and to outgun law enforcement officers.

Belize City is: where do the gangs end and how close are they, in habit and support, to the political reds and blues?

There is no longer any doubt in any sensible mind that there is a very real connection between the Belize City gangs and a lot of the lower echelon 'troops' of the PUP and the UDP.

To what extent do these connections, via minister's drivers and others, allow what is happening in Belize City to continue unchecked by law? How often are these young 'shooters' in and out of detention with a prominent lawyer and bail money on call?

Also, to what extent today are Belize's

gangs being infiltrated by a whole new, and much rougher, gun culture via young Belizean being poured out of US jails and "shipped" home? What control does our law have over these returning young men arrested in the USA for crimes committed there? Why does Belize have to pay the price of bringing them back into society, or cough up the cost of returning them to prison here?

The crime situation in our neighboring countries, to the south and west has recently deteriorated to the extent that new and deadly gangs are emerging in Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. They care so little about being identi-

fied that they defiantly tattoo their faces with their gang symbols.

These people HAVE to carry guns and /or knives as part of their culture and so if this gang tatooing starts to happen in Belize City, then the law and the police have no choice but to strike back - with gun and knife searches at random whenever a gang member offers his or her tatooed identification as proof of gang membership.

Cleaning up Belize City should be a government priority, however and whoever it offends. It must be tackled now, tomorrow is too late.

BACONGO speaks out in support of SATIIM

Press Release San Ignacio

Belize markets itself as 'Mother Nature's Best Kept Secret,' a country able to flaunt the proud statistic of having 44% of the country's land and sea under protected status. Reading such a statistic you might think that it reflects the effects of good governance by a country that truly values its natural resources. Reading beyond the statistic at what is really happening you might be more inclined to think that the canopy of our forests only serves to hide the impacts of mismanagement by a government that sees the label 'protected area' as a short-term status for land that they haven't figured out a way to exploit yet.

What is really happening is that our forests are a poaching ground for mahogany hunters. According to an NRDC report, 40% of our mahogany trade is in illegally exported trees.

What is really happening is that despite the fact that by 2005 nearly 40 million xate leaves departed our forests illegally (Bridgewater et al 2005), the government has granted a concession for legal harvest of xate in an already depleted Chiquibul reserve. What is really happening is that the government removes land from areas co-managed with surrounding communities such as has happened with Mayflower Bocawina and Don Eljio Panti National Park.

And now, if the government has its way, the canopy will obscure the work of US Capital Energy in the Sarstoon-Temash National Park. US Capital Energy, with the blessings of our government, plans to begin oil exploration, despite the fact that the community co-managers of the park, SATIIM, are against it. The value of our national parks and reserves should

not be underestimated and the people best suited to determine their value are the people whose well-being depends on them. Unlike the government and US Capital Energy, the people of SATIIM do not think that financial gain is reason enough to dissolve protection for their forests and the people that depend on them. We need to respect the voices of our communities that co-manage their natural resources.

This is especially important when the community has every reason to be concerned. Villagers must first and foremost consider their own health and that of future generations. And villagers have also demonstrated their commitment to the continued well-being of the land that supports their lives - Sarstoon-Temash National Park, and the life-giving water that passes through it. At every phase,

beginning from the initial exploration, the extraction of oil has negative impacts on human health and the environment. Without even considering spills or accidents the effects range from deforestation for clearing lines during seismic testing to the hazards of water contaminated with heavy metals and toxins during drilling (Epstein and Elber 2002). So, SATIIM has every right to say no to the EIAs that are just a first step in the road to oil exploration and exploitation.

Recognizing SATIIM's need for public support, BACONGO (Belize Alliance of Conservation NGOs) fully supports SATIIM's stance and acknowledges their right to oversee every aspect of the EIA process and assuring every activity in the park is done right. They are the stewards of the land.

TOPICAL TIDBITS

Take a glass of wine



Drinking a little red wine could protect against a serious lung disease, researchers have shown.

A chemical in wine, resveratrol, appears to damp down inflammation in the potentially fatal lung condition chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Researchers writing in the journal *Thorax* found the chemical was more effective than existing medications for COPD.

In COPD, the lungs deteriorate, making it difficult, and eventually impossible, to breathe.

All doctors can do is relieve patients' symptoms. The condition cannot be treated.

Newlyweds like Belize & Costa Rica



Theresa DiMasi (brides.com): Costa Rica and Belize are two of the most "up and coming" honeymoon destinations right now.

Costa Rica is a great spot for active couples. It's well known for its zip line (canopy) tours, which send visitors swinging through the forest's treetop

canopy via a cable and a harness - not to mention the great surfing.

In Belize, honeymooners can also tour the jungle, swim under waterfalls and explore ancient Mayan ruins.

Renee Duane-Meyer, president & founder of Unforgettable Honeymoons, Inc. recommends the Turtle Inn in Belize. Owned by Francis Ford Coppola, thatched villas are set on 650 feet of beach near a small fishing village. The honeymoon cottage, with a private garden and Japanese bath, costs a little over \$400 a night (including breakfast).

Ecotourism in Toledo



From The New York Times: "A number of rain forest ecolodges are offering visitors hands-on experiences to get a sense of life in the rain forest.

"Opened on New Year's Day in Toledo, the southernmost region of Belize, the Cotton Tree Lodge has all the hallmarks of environmental sustainability: an off-the-grid existence, solar power, an organic garden and a reforestation program that plants teak and mahogany trees. The resort has also created a composting system with flush toilets and a self-contained reservoir that uses banana plants to return nutrients to the soil.

But the lodge's most unusual draw



might be its traditional chocolate-making workshops. These offer guests hands-on experiences involving everything from picking fruit from cacao trees and drying the beans with local Maya farmers to cooking chocolate and discussing fair trade with members of the Toledo Cacao Growers Association.

"We have a few producing cacao trees and have recently planted about 500 new ones," said Jeff Pzena, who heads up the chocolate-making opera-

tion at Cotton Tree.

Cotton Tree is also working with Sustainable Harvest International to establish a demonstration farm to introduce the neighboring community to agricultural practices that have lower environmental impact, like organic pesticide-free growing and smokeless stoves for roasting cocoa beans.

Ecuador threatens to expel World Bank



Boosted by a referendum on Sunday that overwhelmingly backed his reform agenda, Rafael Correa, Ecuador's leftwing president, has accused the World Bank of extortion and threatened to kick out the multilateral lender.

The remarks suggest Mr Correa views the referendum victory as an important battle with his domestic political opponents and has now shifted his focus to his antagonists in the international arena.

The president said he would be asking the Bank's representative in Ecuador why the lender refused to disburse a \$100m loan in 2005, when Mr Correa was finance minister. "If he doesn't give explications that we consider satisfactory, we will expel the World Bank representative because we won't accept any blackmail from anyone," he said.

In an interview with the Financial Times at the time, Mr Correa said that by denying the loan at the last moment, the World Bank had broken a contract with the Andean country.

"This is an offence for Ecuador. A loan had been approved and was in place and they are cancelling it, completely outside any ethical or legal principle, because we changed a law," he told the FT at the time. "We are a sovereign country. Nobody can punish us because we are changing our own laws."

On Sunday, Mr Correa won his second electoral victory in six months, by securing strong approval of his proposal for sweeping political reform: more than 78 per cent of voters supported his plan

to set up an assembly to rewrite the constitution.

Panamanian highway contract

Solel Boneh International Ltd. has



won a Guatemala government contract to rebuild and maintain the 330-kilometer Transversal del Norte, part of the Puebla-Panama Plan, a development corridor running from Puebla, Mexico, to Panama in a \$672 million deal. Construction is due to take three years and maintenance work will continue for ten years. The Guatemala government will repay the investment over the 30-year franchise period.

Solel Boneh says that the cost of the project is \$242 million, and the maintenance work is \$43 million. The Guatemala government's payments during the franchise period, including financing costs, are \$672 million.

Solel Boneh International is a subsidiary of Housing and Construction Holding Co. Ltd. (Shikun_u'Binui) (TASE: HUCN), held through Solel Boneh Building and Infrastructure Ltd.

Guats 'Gana' chooses candidate



Guatemala's ruling party the Great National Alliance (Gana) on Sunday chose Alejandro Giammattei as its can-

(Please Turn To Page 11)



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Your weekly
HOROSCOPE

ARIES (Mar. 21- April 20)

You can sell your ideas to those who have the money to back them. Don't make large purchases unless you have discussed your choices with your mate. Help others solve their dilemmas. You may find that others do not do things the way you want; however, if the job gets done, let it pass. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.

TAURUS (Apr. 21- may 21)

You will be emotional with regard to your personal life. You can convince others to follow suit. Your ability to communicate with ease will win the hearts of those you are in touch with this week. You can expect sorrow to evolve from the information you discover. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

GEMINI (May 22-June 21)

Do not yield to children or relatives when they really don't deserve it. You will find that unfinished projects at home will be most satisfying. Family trips or projects should be on your mind. Tell it like it is. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Try not to let relatives or friends cause any friction with your mate. You can get phenomenal returns if you present your ideas to those who can back your interests. Put some energy into getting back into shape. Listen to reason. You are ahead of your time, and trying to stay in one spot could be asking too much. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

LEO (July 23-Aug 22)

Problems with in-laws may cause friction in your personal relationship. Avoid disputes with family; their complaints can't change anything anyway. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.

VIRGO (Aug. 23 -Sept. 23)

Travel will entice you; however, a tendency to overspend is quite possible. Uncertainty regarding your mate may emerge; reevaluate what you see in each other. You will learn a great deal from people with different cultural backgrounds. Purchases will be well worth it and they will last a long time. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.

LIBRA (Sept. 24 -Oct. 23)

However, you must not neglect your family. You could have a need to make some changes this week. You may be emotional and quick to judge others. Chances to express your ideas and beliefs can bring popularity as long as you're not arrogant. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24 - Nov. 22)

When the work is done, they may serve you for a change. Eliminate situations that are no longer to your advan-

tage. Try not to be too lavish with your lover. Your domestic scene could continue to be in an uproar this week. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 23 -Dec. 21)

Don't let your stubborn nature get the better of you. Don't overspend to impress others. You could be disillusioned if you let relative in on your emotional thoughts. Do something together and you'll be surprised how sweet a deal you can make. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

CAPRICORN (Dec 22.- Jan. 20)

Family members will not be happy with the amount of time you are spending away from home. You may find yourself in a heated dispute with a friend if you try to change your mind. Don't be critical or overly opinionated with dislikes; it could cause disapproval and unwanted opposition. You may be overreacting to a situation at hand. Invite friends or relatives into your home. Your lucky day this week will be Monday.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 21 -Feb. 19)

Don't gamble unless you can afford to lose. Be careful when dealing with investments. Raise your self esteem and your confidence if you want to get back into the mainstream again. You may have been too nice to a friend who just wanted to take advantage of you. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.

PISCES (Feb. 20-Mar. 20)

You may find yourself caught in the middle of an argument that has nothing to do with you. You can make profitable investments if you purchase an art object for your home. You should look into making some physical changes, such as new hair color or toning up your body. Don't be afraid to say what's on your mind. Your lucky day this week will be Wednesday.



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Whale of a tale: the Lord covers Musa's renege of Japan-financed CartRoad

In a career spanning four decades, Lord Ashcroft — born Michael Anthony Ashcroft — has assumed a variety of mantles. He was a callow accountant, an up-and-coming contract cleaning entrepreneur, a Thatcher-era corporate raider, Belize's Ambassador to the United Nations, and treasurer of the Conservative Party.

Yet it is his latest incarnation that may raise eyebrows. Meet Baron Ashcroft of Chichester KCMG, ecological warrior.

This week, Lord Ashcroft will emerge as the backer of a campaign — or, in his words, “a programme of persuasion” — aimed at coaxing six eastern Caribbean countries to withdraw their support for whaling. The island nations — Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia and St Vincent and The Grenadines, which between them have a population of 560,000 — receive a total of \$16 million (£8 million) a year in fisheries aid from Japan. In return, they have consistently voted with Japan and its principal ally Norway at the International Whaling Commission (IWC) to overturn the 1986 moratorium on commercial whaling.

With the next IWC convention due to be held in Anchorage, Alaska, next month, Lord Ashcroft has devised and funded a television advertising campaign — which will break in these six nations this week — to highlight a pro-whaling stance of which he believes the majority of their peoples are unaware and which has never been subjected to vigorous public debate.

But lest anyone run away with the idea that *Atlantic Goose*, the 150ft motor yacht on which he traverses the world's oceans, could become the next *Rainbow Warrior*, he is keen to make one point clear.

“I do not profess to be a conservationist nor an environmentalist,” he says. “Other than the minor exception of aboriginal subsistence whaling in small countries, I believe there is no justification on either scientific or commercial grounds for the killing of what I regard as some of the world's most beautiful creatures.”

So how did he get involved? The roots of his engagement go back to Belize, the former British colony where he spent three years as a child and where he has commercial and charitable interests.

Just over a year ago, the Environmental Investigation Agency, the London-based pressure group to which he had previously provided support, approached him to use his influence within Belize to seek its continuing support against proposals for the resumption of whaling at the 2006 IWC meeting at St Kitts.

He is an avid whale-watcher: from the Bay of Cortez in Mexico, where grey whales breed, to the fishing grounds of

the South Atlantic, where he has observed humpback whales from a matter of feet.

“Every month I'm on the water somewhere,” he says. “I've grown a close affinity, not just for whales, but for dolphins and porpoises. So it wasn't difficult for me to approach the Belizean authorities with such a brief.” He discovered that Belize's annual subscription to the IWC — £10,000 — had lapsed and came up with the cash. That backing yielded swift results when a crucial vote was won by the anti-whaling nations by a majority of one.

“The presence of Belize was critical,” he says. “Even though Japan and its supporters would have required a three-quarters majority to overturn the current ban, the fact that it was Belize's vote that made the simple majority established the moral high ground.”

Ironically, his anti-whaling efforts correspond with those of a British Government for which he, now deputy chairman of the Conservative Party, evidently has little time. A British diplomatic campaign has led to six new nations joining the IWC over the past year, but Lord Ashcroft is unimpressed and claims to have been “disappointed” by the answers that he received from the Government in response to questions he tabled in the House of Lords last year on its attitude towards whaling.

Lord Ashcroft's environmental stance might appear to sit neatly alongside a Conservative Party whose slogan for next month's council elections is “Vote Blue, Go Green”. A little too neat? “This has been going on for longer than that campaign has,” he retorts. “And I'm not putting myself forward as an environmentalist. I just like whales.”

But he does appear far removed from stereotypical hunting, shooting and fishing Tory grandee of old. “The most I've ever done in my life is go on the occasional bird shoot,” he says, “but I didn't really get any pleasure out of it, and I haven't done it for 20 years.”

This week's launch aside, Lord Ashcroft has plenty to keep him busy. Within the Conservative Party, his current focus is on opinion research and the oversight of marginal seats. In business, he still has stakes of between 20 per cent and 70 per cent in eight London-listed public companies, including Carlisle Group, his core support services vehicle. He plans to add to these by creating “another couple” of AIM-listed cash shells over the coming months. He also has a 42 per cent stake in Watford Football Club.

Perhaps paradoxically for a man not averse to the spotlight, most of his business interests are now in the private, rather than the public arena — notwithstanding the sale last year of his stake in British Car Auctions, previously his largest private business, for £200 million.

He turned 61 last month but advancing years have not diminished his appetite for a fight. So far, the millions he has donated to the Conservative Party have not been matched by electoral success. For now, the smaller sums he is putting behind the world's largest marine mammals seem

more certain of making their mark.

Editor's note: This report was originally titled “The unexpected face of fight to save the whales- The Conservative Party's deputy chairman has put his weight behind an international campaign” in the Times online.

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TOO WILD FOR WORDS!

April the Tapir celebrates her 24th birthday

The morning was hot, but that didn't stop April the Tapir from enjoying her 24th birthday cake!

Students from Small World Pre-school in Belize City and Little Treasure Preschool in San Ignacio, joined Belize Zoo staff to sing "Happy Birthday" to her for the 24th time!

The cake, made of horse chow, carrots and topped with hibiscus flow-



April enjoys her birthday cake

ers and kumquats, was devoured by April. She seemed to have no objection to sharing this unique cake with her enclosure mates, Ceibo and Bullethead.

All of the pre-schoolers seemed to know that the tapir is our National Animal and a rare and endangered species.

Celso Poot and Lugi Cruz, repre-

senting the education department at The Belize Zoo, noted that April has brought about an increase in awareness about her species throughout Belize.

After April ate her birthday cake, the children enjoyed cupcakes in the zoo's playground area.

A great morning for all at The Belize Zoo!!

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T

een

Page



Report by Julia Heusner

It was an exciting night as almost 30 teens participated in Chris and Karen Chaleki’s Ballroom Dance Competition on April 21, 2007 at the Holly Redeemer Parish Hall.

The event was also a fund raiser for the new building at Pallotti High School. A delicious meal was provided and served by Pallotti students.

Dance competition categories were: Fox Trot, Waltz, Quick Step,Paso Doble, Samba ,Cha-Cha, Rumba ,and Tango.

The overall winning students were:



Carolyn Woods and Justin Usher won 1st place overall.

- 1st place—couple number 105 Adrian Bosch and Shamera Myers
 - 2nd place—Couple number 118 Justin Usher and Carolyn Woods
 - 3rd place— couple number 115 Salim Hoy and Inga Woods
- In the overall open competition:
- In 1st place couple number 118 Justin Usher and Carolyn Woods
 - In 2nd place couple number 115 Salim Hoy and Inga Woods
 - in 3rd place couple number 119 Andrew Gillett and Amauri Amoa

Other competitors included: Gabriel Baron partnered with Danielle Cano, David Burgess & Sheryl Palacio, Graciano Choc & Angelia Guy, Anthony Coombs & Samira Acosta, Stuart Ferrier & Issandra Garcia, Raheem Martinez & Carlie Perez, Martin Quiros & Lauren Garnet, Frank Tu & Anne Link , Leo Wilson & Nandi Woods, Jessica Ton & Amy Wu.

The judges where Esmeralda Almenderez, Althea Sealey, Mirium Chun, Dawn Atterley, Nola Perez, Lionel Castillo, Robert Robinson, and William Neal. The Emcee was Chris

Dancing the Night Away

Chaleki.

Audience member Dianne Lindo liked the show, “I am glad to see young people dancing sensibly instead of Dutty wine and Willy bounce.” Some of the other audience members told the Independent teen page they would like to join the class next year.

Husband and wife team Chris and Karen Cheleki have been dancing together for 12 years now and they are ballroom champions and 5th place winners United States National competition.

If you would like to join the Ballroom dance class, it is held at the Princess Hotel and Casino every Wednesday. All ages are welcome and there is no reason to be shy, according to Chris, “If you can walk, you can dance.”



Nandy Woods and Leo Wilson move in sync.



Young dancers displayed ballroom etiquette, bowing to their partners

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RBTT mulls 'combination/ partnership' venture

➡ (Continued From Page 1)

The workers furiously contended last week, that if this alleged deal goes through, their future is unsure.

Trinidad's president general of the Banking, Insurance and General Workers Union (BIGWU), Vincent Cabrera, not ruling out that an agreement could be reached between the two banks, said: "Any takeover or merger could inevitably result in retrenchment and the union could only handle matters for financial members. The society needs to decide whether foreign ownership of local banks is desirable, bearing in mind the strategic importance of the financial services sector."

One staffer said: "Hinging on this alleged offer that RBTT sharehold-

ers could receive TT\$14 per share and two FCIB shares, that to me is a rip-off and should not be accepted.

RBTT was going in the region of TT\$45 per share just a couple years ago and from what is circulating, its current value remains in that area, TT\$14 cash in hand is unacceptable," he said.

Many financial analysts are of the view that given the fact that taxpayers have a 20 per cent stake in RBTT, the Securities and Exchange Commission and the ministry of Finance should say something.

"You have RBTT's managing di-

rector Catherine Kumar talking of investing US\$50 million, talking about a recast programme and so on." That US\$50 million is existing shareholders' money. I can't see how they can be entertaining discussions to merge or sell, this same aggressive RBTT.

"The state is boasting of its thrust to make Trinidad and Tobago the financial centre of the Caribbean, yet stories of alleged talks behind the scenes, which could result in the merger or sale of our largest financial institution, taking account of its asset base - to an entity headquartered outside of Trinidad and To-

bago, to me that is real capital flight," the analyst said.

My Note: The RBTT Financial Group comprises many companies, including RBTT Merchant Bank Limited, RBTT Trust Limited, and ten commercial banks with an extensive network of bank branches, ATMs and thousands of Point-of-Sale terminals located throughout the English speaking Caribbean, from Jamaica in the north, to the Eastern Caribbean, Trinidad in the south, Suriname on the mainland of South America, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba.

Police gaffe makes Muslims pray in wrong direction

A Dutch police station trying to help Muslim detainees face Mecca for their prayers painted arrows in cells pointing in the wrong direction.

The Segbroek police station in The Hague borrowed the idea of putting compass marks on ceilings from an Amsterdam hotel, the Dutch daily De Telegraaf reported on Friday.

Muslims pray five times a day, facing east in the direction of Mecca. But the arrows in Segbroek pointed west.

"This is a really gigantic, stupid blunder," a police spokesman told the De Telegraaf.

"The faulty compass marks have been immediately corrected. It is a mystery for us how this could have possibly happened".

All other police cells in the Dutch capital will soon get similar compass marks, the in-house newspaper of The Hague police said.

The Netherlands is home to 1 million Muslims out of a population of more than 16 million.

Immigration and the integration of newcomers have been hot topics since the rise and murder of populist politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002, who said the country could not absorb any more foreigners.

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